After twenty years of trying

The French finally produce a Rock Band

LITTLE BOB STORY becomes France's nuclear rock hope

Demented Italian/Franco myopic rocking hobbit, Little Bob Story. Allez Johnny Allez!

"LEETLEBOUB, LEETLEBOUB" the audience chants, pronouncing the 'o' in Bob the same way Inspector Clouseau pronounces it in "moth".

This is Le Havre, loosely the Liverpool of France 'cept in Liverpool you could at least afford to get drunk. *Sur le continent* they're looking pityingly on your sterling traveller's cheques while charging you for the beer, the glass, the napkin, the service, and the chair you sit on.

The reason the audience is wriggling with proud anticipation and slavering "Leetleboub" is because, after 20 years of trying, *La France* has finally produced a band that can play rock and roll. Archaelogical evidence of ancient attempts to rock out *en Francaise* remains on the wall backstage at the Francois Premiere hall — a spartan rectangle resembling a school hall — where faded pin-ups of Johnny Hallyday and Sheila the ye-ye girl are still affixed with sellotape.

The band about to get it on is Little Bob Story, and local sentiment is running high because these *garcons* are from Le Havre.

Before Little Bob, the audience is lengthily treated to three punky rock efforts, a situation that hit me in the face on observing the rinky-dink Peugeots littering the sidewalk and the Marquee-sized crowd, wiry and shaded almost to a man, er, punk.

The first lot, Rackham Le Rouge (named Anglophilically after a *Tin-Tin* character), are very young and arouse my sympathy while clawing their way desperately through the Doors' "Break On Sroo (To Ze Ozzair Side)", Lou Reed and all like that. Later I twig there's a member of the band fruitlessly sawing a violin in a corner, hopelessly "progressive" and inaudible in the circs.

Bad Stuff come next and are so immediatley awful in a massacre of "I'm Going Down" that *le press Anglaises* telepathically sprint to the same exit and flee to the bar across the street.

Outside swarms of studiedly mean looking 14 year old boys zip and sputter up and down on their motortrikes like cartoon hornets, and a dashed handsome kid with a black eye and blue bruised cheek eyes us arrogantly over his lemonade.

A fattish, 30ish guy with a beard sits down behind me. "Psst", someone nudges me and, indicating him with a sly nod, hisses "Jim Morrison". *Sacre bleu!* For a second I ogled, but Jim wouldn't be caught dead here. *(Is that some kind of a joke? — Ed.)*

Back in the box Parisian band Shakin' Street are into Stones impressions. They sport a tuff chick bass player, but nobody pays much attention to her wrestling with her instrument while the daintier, Pre-Raphaelite pin-up of a singer is shakin' it in a scanty slip with nothing under it except net stockings. Her shrill screaming doesn't bear close scrutiny, but guys who probably borrowed the cameras they're holding for the occasion are merrily writhing in a tangle right under her feet through "Little Queenie", "Gimme Shelter" and "Happy". The actual audience looks less impressed, and the band is really not too bad, gutsy and with a nice little drummer.

What gets me is that all these people think they're singing in English. At least I *think* they think they're singing in English. And the audience likewise think *they're* singing along in English, but I can't make out what they're on about half the time. Going by the chord changes, every band seems to be doing the same song over and over, but apparently "Little Queenie", "Johnny B. Goode", "Roll Over Beethoven", "Lucille" and "Oh Carol" are lyrically distinguishable as such to the natives.

Despite widespread cries of "Leetleboub, Leetleboub" Shakin' Street come back for an encore — guess they don't understand English — and naturally it's "Johnny B. Goode", and pretty well done, too. Damned if I couldn't play it myself by this time.

At this point one ought to master the French phrase suitable for shouting in place of "Wally!", "Get It On!" and "All Right!", which as I understand it is "Ca Va!" This can be yelled to general approval in any lull, apparently either as a question or statement of fact.

Little Bob himself, Robert Piazza on his passport, looks like Hollywood hobbit Paul Williams would have looked if he'd been in Kilburn and the High Roads — a garden gnome in specs, Levis and leather braces.

COUNTDOWN TO THE FRENCH BREAKTHROUGH

1958: De Gaulle tells U.N. — "France will have its own Rock 'n' Roll deterrent within 20 years.

1962: Johnny Halliday exploded in secret underground tests. "Back to the drawing board," say French scientists.

1976: Le Havre dancehall destroyed by LITTLE BOB STORY

He's quite delightful, hurtling his paunchy five foot frame nimbly around the stage and aggressively belting like a bullfrog on uppers. Bob has a raunchy, compelling stage presence, partly because his is a distinctive figure, to say the least, but more because his enthusiasm and attack is outstanding.

Lead guitarist Guy George Gremy is Chinese-French, suitably inscrutable, immobile of body, and somewhat gorgeous. His playing is a pat but racy synthesis of James Burton, Chuck Berry, the Clapeckage 60's school and Wilko Johnson, scoring high on technical points and cooly combustible.

"Merci! Ca va! Cette chanson s'appelle 'Lucille'," Bob quipps for openers. This time "Lucille" is hot 'n' taut, and the audience is with some justification going *les bananes*.

Their songs and riffs are heavily Willie Dixon, Animals and Them oriented, but the breakneck set includes a less common gem in a flashy take of the Small Faces' "All Or Nothing" and several punchy numbers by Piazza. "High Time", the title track off their LP, and the blistering "So Bad", come off with hysteria worthy of Jerry Lee Lewis or the Flamin' Groovies. Ca va!

The three Dominiques — Guillon on rhythm guitar, "Mino" Quertier on drums and "Barbe Noire" (Blackbeard) Lelan on bass are less inspired than Bob and Guy, but Mino's sledge hammer style and Guillon's posing and flailing work quite well, while the big and beefy Lelan's hard lines are on the deft, busy side.

The audience's participatory buzzing is a major factor in zapping the band up to real sensation level — in London they have yet to call much attention to themselves in the New Wave shuffle. Keyed up and freaking after a few encores they're at their sharpest for a heady Berry medley, Guy springing into action on some real whoopee solos.

Little Bob Story are being widely described as the Feelgoods of France, and it's a pretty fair notion. Though they have some way to go they've definitely got what it takes, and with a little encouragement on this side of the Channel they will drag French rock into credibility.

ANGIE ERRIGO

"No Reg, I have the butterfly on my ass."

The Man who tattooed Cher's buns

LYLE TUTTLE is a cosmetic tattooist. He can disguise an unsightly mole, recreate eyebrows, or cover an entire bod in gorgeous designs.

At $75 (£45) an hour, this San Franciscan holds an international reputation as Tattooist To The Stars.

In the old days Janis Joplin bopped down to his studios and had a scar on her wrist covered with a flower bracelet.

Joan Baez had a little blue flower inked over a birthmark.

"Eyebrows are big this year," says Tuttle. "It takes about an hour to put on a pair; every line must be razor-sharp. If an art line is a little off it doesn't matter, but on eyebrows it does, it's critical."

What's the future of cosmetic tattooing?

Lyle explains, "it's a craft, not an art, or a science . . . yet. Someday it might be a science. Right now I'm working with a local plastic surgeon, trying to develop a method for removing old tattoos and dirt road scars, the result of a motorcycle accident say. In both cases the stain is imbedded in the skin, usually far below the 64th of an inch the tattoo needle penetrates."

Chortling about his title, "Tattooist To The Stars", he says, "most of that stuff is decorative, but the job I did for Cher was cosmetic. She got a very bad case of sunburn on her buns, which left a latticework discoloration when it healed. It couldn't be removed — it was too large — so I covered it up with roses and a butterfly."

One of Lyle's six phones ring and he's off on another job — Hollywood and yet another star, one he didn't want to identify. "She's on the box every week and has a port-wine stain over a breast." In conclusion he adds: "There are people like me who are researching inks and needles and there's bound to be an improvement. I can see medical personnel, not necessarily doctors, studying and mastering tattooing."

JOE STEVENS

WATCH OUT — PUNK VINYL'S ABOUT

LATELY, YOU MAY have noticed that many singles seem to have acquired an additional rhythm track — one comprised of a miscellany of clicks, plops and hisses.

Reason is that punk rock is currently being matched by punk plastic. Stiff Records ran into the problem recently — their first batch of Roogalator singles proving so horrific, surfacewise, that they sent the whole shaboodle back to EMI for immediate repressing.

Where does punk plastic emanate?

One source is recycled vinyl — old discs melted down to provide fodder for the next hiccup from the disco machine. Recycled vinyl is recognisable by the whitish bands on the disc.

But EMI say it ain't so. Our old friend A. Spokesman carefully explained.

"The faults with such discs cannot be fully attributed to reprocessed vinyl. After all, we — like every other major record-producing firm — have been using such material for many years. We do melt down discs returned from dealers and use the pastic again — but generally as a last resort. First and foremost we'd use the excess material gathered from our presses, then would come waste from trial pressing runs and new discs which have failed to pass our own inspection."

Why the reluctance to use dealer's returns?

"Because while where's nothing wrong with re-cycling vinyl, there is a danger that it can be contaminated by dirt. When we re-use plastic from our factory we at least know it's been in controlled conditions and therefore less likely to have been contaminated. But discs returned from shops could have been subjected to a degree of dust-gathering and that's where the danger lies — one reason why we try not to use material from that source very often."

What happens to the labels on any discs that *do* become subjected to the big mash? Do they end up as part of the rejuvenated plastic?

No — in Britain we dink labels. that is, we press out the entire centre complete with label and throw that away. In the States they sometimes try washing the labels off but particles always remain, surfacing later and causing discs to be near unplayable. Dinking is another reason we don't like using dealer's returns — it means we have to pay for an added operation and eventually the cost is such that we might just as well use virgin material."

So with our system, the recycling of vinyl is perfectly okay then? "In the main, yes — though, of course, there can always be cases of contamination."

Fair enough, but the rumour is that second-time-around plastic is still not high-grade and not really usable on albums — which may explain Stiff's problem, for their singles were meant to play at 33⅓ rpm.

FRED DELLAR

DOG SHOOTS MAN . . . AGAIN!

READERS WERE no doubt shocked and horrified by our recent *THRILLS* tale of the dog who shot his master. Well, it's happened again, and this time the story is even more bizarre.

In the small town of Luneville (really) in France, a man is casually walking down the street when he was shot in the shoulder by a dog firing a hunting rifle from a nearby hotel window. Police reported that the dog's owner had left the rifle leaning against the window, the hound jumped and it went off.

THRILLS would like to discover whether these gun dogs are engaged in some kind of conspiracy. Does anyone keep statistics? For all we know, hitdogs could be on the increase. What better way to rub out rival gangleaders or Presidents than with a skilfully trained dog? This threat could make even rabies look tame by comparison.

DICK TRACY